

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 5123

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: POL, MILI, NATO, IT, US
SUBJECT: NATO AEW: AMBASSADOR'S COURTESY CALL ON DEFMIN LATTANZIO

1. MY INITIAL CALL ON DEFENSE MINISTER LATTANZIO WAS
PRIMARILY DEVOTED TO HIS DESCRIPTION OF THE EVOLUTION OF
THE MARCH 25 DPC MEETING CONCERNED WITH AWACS.

2. LATTANZIO DETAILED THE PRESENT SEVERE ECONOMIC
CONSTRAINTS UPON THE GOI. HE WAS ABLE TO OBTAIN PASSAGE
OF THE AIR FORCE PROMOTIONAL LAW AND LOOKED TO LEGISLATIVE
APPROVAL OF THE PROCUREMENT LAW FOR THE ARMY BUT ONLY WITH
THE GREATEST DIFFICULTY AND UNDER CONTINUOUS ATTACK AND
CRITICISM. IT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE IN HIS VIEW FOR THE
GOVERNMENT TO SEEK ADDITIONAL MILITARY APPROPRIATIONS
FROM THE PARLIAMENT AT THIS TIME. BOTH NATO AEW AND
INFRASTRUCTURE AUGMENTATION WERE AFFECTED BY THIS SITUATION.
IN A VERY USEFUL MEETING HE HAD WITH SECDEF BROWN,
LATTANZIO EXPLAINED THE ITALIAN PROBLEM IN DETAIL. BUT,
HE SAID, HIS POSITION WAS THAT EITHER ITALY WAS IN THE
ALLIANCE OR NOT. AS AN ALLY HE FELT ITALY HAD
TO TAKE A STEP TO PUT AWACS BACK ON THE TRACK AT LEAST FOR
THE MOMENT. A FULL AGREEMENT IN HIS VIEW HAD BEEN
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PREVENTED BY A HARD LINE FROM THE U.K. AND, HE THOUGHT,
THE FRG STILL HELD SOME RESERVATIONS. BUT AWACS
REPRESENTED AN IMPORTANT POLITICAL MOVE IN THE ALLIANCE
AND, WITHOUT AUTHORITY AND WITHOUT INSTRUCTIONS HE TOOK
THE STEP TO AGREE TO OBTAIN ITALIAN COMMITMENT TO AT LEAST
A SYMBOLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE AEW PROGRAM. IT WAS HIS
HOPE THAT WITHIN A YEAR OR TWO ITALY MIGHT BE IN THE

POSITION TO MAKE A MORE SUBSTANTIAL CONTRIBUTION.

3. IN LATTANZIO'S OPINION THE MARCH 25 MEETING WAS AN ERROR. IT OUGHT NOT TO HAVE BEEN HELD UNTIL THERE WAS PRIOR AGREEMENT. BETWEEN NOW AND JULY A GOOD DEAL OF WORK WILL HAVE TO BE DONE TO PREVENT THE ALLIES FROM SEEKING INDIVIDUAL SOLUTIONS OUTSIDE THE NATO AEW FRAMEWORK. PART OF THE WORK WILL HAVE TO BE DONE WITH FRANCE WHOSE PARTICIPATION WILL BE IMPORTANT. THE PROBLEM AT THIS STAGE IS POLITICAL, NOT TECHNICAL.

4. LATTANZIO SAID HE THOUGHT IT WOULD BE VERY USEFUL IF HE COULD HAVE DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARY OF DEFENSE BROWN BEFORE THE JULY MEETING. HE WAS PREPARED TO GO TO THE UNITED STATE TO MEET WITH THE SECDEF OR IF THE SECRETARY WAS PLANNING A VISIT TO EUROPE A MEETING BETWEEN THEM COULD BE HELD HERE IN ROME.

5. THERE WERE REALLY TWO PROBLEMS THE ITALIANS SAW IN AWACS IN ITS PRESENT CONFIGURATION. THE FIRST WAS ECONOMIC. THE SECOND, BY NO MEANS UNIMPORTANT, WAS ITS EMPHASIS ON THE DEFENSE OF CENTRAL EUROPE. AS PROJECTED, THE NATO AEW SYSTEM COVERED ONLY THE NORTHERN PART OF ITALY, NONE OF GREECE AND ONLY PART OF TURKEY. THERE SEEMED, IN HIS VIEW, A LACK OF UNDERSTANDING IN BRUSSELS FOR THE CHANGES THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE AND THE INCREASING PRESSURES BEING BROUGHT TO BEAR ON THE MEDITERRANEAN BY THE WARSAW PACT.

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6. LATTANZIO SAID HE WAS HIMSELF ENGAGED IN "DEVELOPING A GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN". HIS EFFORTS HE SAW AS SUPPORTIVE OF NATO GOALS (AND HE IMPLIED TO FILL THE GAP NATO CONTINUED TO IGNORE). HIS VISIT TO TUNIS ON MARCH 23-24 WAS DEAQNBQONTEXT.# TUNIS IS THE ONLY ARAB COUNTRY, HE SUGGESTED, THAT HAS CLEARLY OPTED FOR THE WEST. IT IS UNDER GREAT PRESSURES, INCLUDING FROM QADDAFI WHO HAS TURNED LIBYA INTO A VIRTUAL SATELLITE OF THE USSR. TUNISIA, HOWEVER, IS OUR BRIDGEHEAD TO AFRICA. IN THE EVOLUTION OF HIS "GOOD NEIGHBOR POLICY", LATTANZIO WILL SEE THE GREEK DEFENSE MINISTER AVEROF THIS WEEK AND THE SPANISH AS SOON AS HE CAN. HE SEEMS TO SEE HIS NEIGHBORHOOD AS COMPOSED OF THOSE COUNTRIES, PLUS FRANCE. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT EXPATiate ON THE SPECIFIC PURPOSES OF THIS ALIGNMENT OF MEDITERRANEAN POWERS, LATTANZIO OBSERVED THAT SPAIN'S INCLUSION RELATED TO DEVELOPMENTS IN THAT COUNTRY WHICH INDICATED IT WOULD SOON BE READY, IF IT WAS NOT ALREADY, TO BE A PART OF THE ALLIANCE.

7. I THANKED LATTANZIO FOR HIS FRANK COMMENTS AND ASSURED HIM OF THE STRONG SUPPORT ITALY ENJOYS IN THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION. BRIEFLY I OUTLINED FOR HIM THE PRECEPTS OF U.S. POLICY TOWARD ITALY AND EMPHASIZED OUR UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIFFICULTIES PRESENTLY FACING THE GOVERNMENT OF ITALY. I INDICATED, TOO, THE IMPORTANCE WE ATTACH TO ITALY'S ACTIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ROLE IN THE ALLIANCE.

8. LATTANZIO ASSURED ME THAT HE PERSONALLY AND THE GOVERNMENT GENERALLY WERE DISPOSED TO SUPPORT AND MOVE FORWARD THOSE ALLIED PROGRAMS THAT DEMONSTRATE THE COHESION OF THE PARTNERSHIP. ITALY'S GOOD WILL IN THIS REGARD WAS DEMONSTRATED BY THE POSITION IT TOOK AT THE DPC. THAT POSITION WAS TAKEN IN A DIFFICULT DOMESTIC POLITICAL CONTEXT. BUT DESPITE THOSE DIFFICULTIES, HE WANTED ME TO KNOW THAT "HERE YOU HAVE FRIENDS". GARDNER
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